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## ALPHABETS OLD AND NEW

lays down two conditions on which the artist may be permitted to tamper with the alphabet: Whatever he does ought, in the first place, to make reading run smoother; and, in the second, to make writing satisfactory to the eye. The way to make reading easier is to mark whatever is characteristic in the letter; to develop what is peculiar to it; to curtail, or it may be to lop off, anything which tends to make us confound it with another; to emphasize, in short, the individuality of each individual letter and make it unmistakable. At the same time there is no reason why reading should not be made pleasant as well as easy. Beauty, that is to say, is worth bearing in mind. It must not, of course, interfere with use; but there is not the least reason why it should. Beauty does not imply elaboration or ornament.

Naturally, what Mr. Day has to say of inventiveness is mainly of a negative character. "It is of no use trying to evolve brand-new alphabets out of your inner consciousness. Originality is what we all desire; but it is scarcely the thing to seek consciously, least of all in lettering; it comes of its own accord if ever it comes. We are original or we are not."

Quite a large number of the 178 plates consist of modern examples more or less closely related to older forms, but some displaying a freshness of invention not always to be accepted readily. However, it must be remembered that an alphabet, as such, shows the letters least advantageously. It is when they are combined into words and considered in relation to their space or accompanying ornament, and also to the material and method of execution, that a fair judgment can be formed of them. In this last particular the book is of specially practical value to the designer. It invites attention to the variations of form resulting from the tool employed and the material used—points much too often overlooked. For this and many other reasons the book is one that the designer will be glad to have near him for reference and inspiration.

### COMPANIONS FOR THE COUNTRY.

At this season of the year, when townfolk are seeking the country and country folk are best repaid for their banishment from town, it is not amiss to draw attention to a few books which will add to the keen enjoyment of coun-

try life. How much the love of flowers is stimulated by a little knowledge of them! It is one of those cases where a little knowledge is not dangerous. The ordinary wayfarer has neither the time nor the capacity for an exhaustive study of botany. What he needs is information sufficiently scientific to be thorough as far as it goes, and yet simple and attractive; a book that will be a companion for his leisure instead of a further taskmaster upon his time. If such a book is one that an intelligent child also can consult, extracting from it just so much as she is capable of assimilating, even if it be only the name of the flower that she has delighted to gather, then it seems to admirably fulfil its purpose of being a family *vade mecum* for the holidays.

A GUIDE TO THE WILD FLOWERS, by ALICE LOUNSBERRY, illustrated by Mrs. ELLIS ROWAN (F. A. Stokes Company: New York), seems to satisfy these conditions. It opens with "A Chapter to Study," in which the author has collected and explained the terms used to describe the organs of a plant. In this way the necessary "little knowledge" is made most easily and expeditiously procurable. Then follows a brief chapter on "Five Conspicuous Plant Families." In the body of the book the plants are grouped according to their environment: for example, under the heading of "Plants Growing in Water," "Plants Growing in Mud," and so on. Then, besides an index of English names and one of Latin, there is an index of color, which makes the book very easy for reference, even to one who is entirely ignorant of the subject. The student is still further assisted by sixty-four colored and one hundred black and white plates, as well as by fifty-four diagrams. This is Mrs. Rowan's share of the work, and most admirably it has been accomplished. For the way in which her drawings have been reproduced and for the general make-up of this handsome volume the publishers must be highly commended.

FIELD, FOREST AND WAYSIDE FLOWERS, with Chapters on Grasses, Sedges and Ferns, by MAUD GOING (The Baker & Taylor Company, New York).

"The chapters of this book are so arranged as to follow the waxing and waning of plant-life during an average season in the North-eastern United States. It is intended more